

When Roy Fox bought a condemned house 20 years ago, he had no idea that he was buying a bit of Portland history.

Fox and his wife Kim were looking for a house to buy when they moved to Portland in 1980. They found a home, then the deal fell through. Roy's brother told him about a house for sale in the Piedmont neighborhood in Northeast Portland and Fox went to take a look. The house was for sale alright but it was also condemned.

Fox and his wife wanted to buy an older home with some character. So he called his wife and said, "I've gotta show you this house." When she arrived at the house, the couple walked around the outside and looked at the rickety back porch, the rotting roof and the collapsed foundation.

Kim touched the doorknob and the back door crashed down into the kitchen. "We must be meant to go in," she said. When they entered, they could see the bathtub in the second floor bathroom from where they stood looking up in the kitchen.

As they sat on the dirty stairs twirling the finials on the stair railing, they looked at each other and said, "This will look nice at Christmas time." Fox says that's when they knew. They had fallen in love with the house and decided to buy it. Fox says they had to pay cash, "because it's hard to get financing on a condemned house." And getting the banks to loan money for repairs wasn't easy.

Fox had just interviewed for a job at BPA. The government had a hiring freeze at the time and Fox was told it would be six months before BPA could hire him. He says they bought the house thinking he would have six months to make repairs. But BPA called a month later and Fox came to work at BPA.

The couple spent evenings and weekends working on the house. It was two years before they could move in because the house needed so much work. In the meantime, they lived with Fox's brother. When his brother moved, the Foxes moved with him.

The Foxes bought the house from a woman who used to work for the Dekum family. The Dekums were a prominent 19th century Portland family. Frank Dekum was a banker

and candy maker. The Dekum building in downtown Portland, where the advertising agency Wieden and Kennedy had their headquarters for years, was named for him. The house the Foxes bought was once owned by Otto Dekum, Frank's son.

When it was built in 1884, the place was a farmhouse and had 160 acres of land around it. The house was never remodeled over the years, and it had all the original hardware, doors and moldings. Five stained

glass windows had been removed and the Foxes were able to find all of them and to buy back three. The owner of the other two refused to sell the windows.

Fox had to replace the furnace, water heater, plumbing, wiring and the roof. They had to replaster the walls and ceilings. As they made repairs, the Foxes found items that had originally been stored in the attic and had fallen into wall cavities. They found letters dating back to the 1860s, old schoolbooks, hats,

shoes and a christening dress that belonged to the Dekum family. They plan to donate the items to the Oregon Historical Society.

The Foxes are still learning about the house, the Dekum family and the neighborhood. In 1905, a congregation met to form the Piedmont Presbyterian Church just a block away from the Foxes' home.

The last part of the home the Foxes repaired was the front porch. Fox spent years looking for a photo of the porch and couldn't find one. His wife finally found an old insurance map that had a footprint of the porch. They found a designer who could duplicate the shape and could create a porch in the design of the late 19th century. The porch cost the Foxes as much as they paid for the house.

Cable TV station HGTV (Home and Garden TV) airs a program, "If Walls Could Talk." The Knoxville, Tenn. producers heard about the Fox house and contacted the Foxes last year. Early last fall, the station came to Portland to film the Foxes and their home for the program. The episode (No. 318) aired in mid January.

The Foxes did all of the restoration work themselves – except for rebuilding the porch. Fox says they followed the National Park Service guidelines for historical preservation. "I'd rather do it right," he says. Fox says they have talked about getting a historic listing for the house and may do so in the future.

After all the time and money they spent making their house into a home, Fox says he has no regrets.

"Knowing what we know now, we would make the same choice," he says.

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Foxes turn hollowed out house into historic home



By fall of 1992, Fox could survey their new home that was almost completely restored. The one big remaining job was the porch. Someone had added this 1920s porch change, but the Foxes wanted to restore the house to its original appearance. Roy's wife, Kim, found old insurance records in 1994 that had the foundation footprint, so they got a contractor to build a new porch in the original shape and design.



Roy Fox and wife Kim stand outside the back of their "dream home" in 1980, just before they bought the fixer-upper in northeast Portland.

By early 1995, the Foxes had completed the restoration on their historic home. Roy says that the couple's two children, born in 1984 and 1989, temporarily slowed down their restoration, but later helped motivate them to continue the work. Fox says their children have enjoyed growing up in the home with restoration in progress.

Photos by Roy and Kim Fox and relatives



Many talented folks play in other groups

Several BPA musicians also play in community bands or orchestras. That includes retirees. Some folks in the Portland-Vancouver area belong to more than one community group.

Among those groups and BPA players are the Clackamas Community Band with Bob Sinclair and Tom Wolf. "Get a Life Marching Band" has John French and Harold Grappe. Bob Sinclair also plays in the new Millennium Concert Band at Lake Oswego, and Jon French also plays in the Mt. Hood Pops Orchestra. Lou Tauber plays in the Mittleman Jewish Community Center Orchestra, and the University of Portland Community Orchestra has Byrne Lovell and Audrey Perino.

By far the largest outside band, with the largest BPA contingent of players, is the "One More Time Around Again Marching Band." The band was formed in the early 1980s to perform for the annual Rose Festival parades and events.

It has 550 plus members and may be the largest band in the world. In the late 1980s, the band played and marched in the Rose Bowl Parade in Pasadena, Calif.



The One More Time Around Again Marching Band took part in the 1999 Portland Rose Festival Parade. Several members of RIF and the Early Outs are among the 550-plus members who make up what may be the world's largest marching band.

Several BPA employees and spouses perform each year with Portland's One More Time Around Again band. Many are members of RIF and the Early Outs. Shown after the 1999 Rose Festival Parade are (left to right) Harold Grappe, Linda Krugel, Jon French, Susan Rustvold, Randi Thomas, Mike D. Miller, Marie Torrillo and Audrey Perino.

Photos by Ken Kane